SCAC Awards Application

August 3, 2026

This applicaton is for:	J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award
Project Title	Solving the Silver Tsunami
County or Counties	Florence County
Application Contact	Kevin Yokim
Application Email Address	kyokim@florencecountysc.gov
Presenter(s) Name and Title	Kevin Yokim, Administrator
Main Presenter's Email Address	kyokim@florencecountysc.gov

Project Written Submission

Project Summary

In the fall of 2025, Florence County established the Florence County Institute, also known as FCI. FCI is a nine-month internally developed training program designed to enhance the leadership qualities of our managers and supervisors.

During the first department head meeting in January 2025, department heads were asked to submit a list of their most important team members - the ones they would hate to see leave. The fifty team members on these lists were then sent an email in March asking them what their biggest difficulty was in managing people at Florence County. Their responses created the topics that were included in FCI - emotional intelligence (EQ), motivation, managing diversity, communication, delegation, time management, conflict resolution, and discipline/corrective action.

These fifty team members were then emailed an application requesting that they apply to be included in the first cohort of FCI. Eighteen of the team members applied and cards signed by the County Administrator were mailed to their homes congratulating them on being chosen to participate in the program.

At the introductory session in August, each cohort member was presented with an FCI t-shirt, a wrapped copy of the book It's Your Ship, which was used throughout the program, and a notebook containing the program syllabus and copies of articles pertaining to each session in the program.

One-hour lunch and learn sessions were held on the second Wednesday of each month in Council chambers to view and discuss a PowerPoint presentation on that month's topic. Participants were also required to read that month's article and the applicable chapter(s) in It's Your Ship and view a LeaderGov Teamwork Summit video on that month's topic and share it with their team members.

At the conclusion of the program, participants were required to write a 2-3 page paper to share what they liked about the program, what they didn't like, what their favorite session was (and why) and what they will do differently as a result of having participated in the program.

Each participant was recognized at the April County Council meeting and presented with a framed Certificate of Completion.

Project Effort/Difficulty

This project was difficult because it had to be developed from scratch. We did use a consultant to help provide direction, but we made the conscious decision to develop this program internally and tailor it to Florence County. We could have merely purchased an "off the shelf" program - which the consultant could have provided - but it wouldn't have felt like Florence County. For instance, as we were developing our session on managing diversity, we discovered - based on the email responses from our potential participants - that our diversity issues were not age, race, or gender. Our diversity issues at Florence County are based on personalities and how they communicate with each other. Therefore, our session on managing diversity was developed with this distinction in mind.

The initial development of the program took a great deal of effort. A book - It's Your Ship - was chosen and re-read to determine which chapters in the book went with each monthly session. Then a search was made for internet articles to be added as required reading for each month's topic. The most time-consuming part of the program development was the creation of eight multi-slide PowerPoint presentations, one for each of the sessions. This was accomplished over several months and occurred during the program itself. In addition, a course syllabus was developed to summarize the course and its requirements.

Our Museum team members developed a logo for the Institute, and this logo was used on the notecards sent to each participant's home, on the notebook cover, and on the FCI t-shirt.

The Executive Assistant to the Administrator handled all the logistics of the program, including mailing out the notecards, putting together all the notebooks, ordering the course books and the t-shirts, and handling all the arrangements for lunch each month.

The Administrator conducted each session, and each session was attended by our Deputy Administrators who provided valuable input.

Many Florence County team members were included in the development of the Florence County Institute and gave of their time to ensure this program was a success.

Benefit/Importance of Project

In 2023, the Florence County department head team spent several months re-writing our vision, mission, and values statements, which were presented to County Council at its retreat in November. Council officially adopted these statements at its December meeting.

Our Vision: Florence County strives to be an exceptional place to live, work, and visit by enhancing the quality of life for our employees and those who call the County home, by encouraging innovation and economic opportunities, and by fostering trust and integrity in the County.

Our Mission: Florence County will provide high quality public services, plan for the needs of our citizens, and promote a safe, healthy, and thriving community for all.

Our Values:

Service: We serve others. We give back.

Excellence: Be better. Make it better.

Humility: It's not about me. It's about we.

However, we have a problem. And this problem is not unique to Florence County. We found that, based on our ages and years of service, half of our senior management and department head team members could retire in the next five years. In fact, a full two thirds of us are aged 50 or older. So now that we have spent all this time developing new vision, mission, and values statements, how do we perpetuate the culture we are trying to instill in our organization?

Jim Collins in his classic book Good to Great states on page 42 that "Great vision without great people is irrelevant." He further states on page 26 that "Level Five leaders want to see the company more successful in the next generation." Many organizations make the claim that their people are their most important asset. However, do these organizations take the time and effort to invest in their people to provide them opportunities for growth and to ensure the success of the organization going forward? This is an Eisenhower Matrix Quadrant Two issue. It is important, but not urgent. Therefore, unfortunately, this issue does not receive the attention it desperately needs.

We already had a leadership development plan in place. We send two or three team members to Leadership Florence and another two or three team members to the Local Government Leadership Institute (LGLI) annually. Many communities have a Leadership _____, which provides an opportunity for individuals to learn about their community and network with other leaders, but this program is not specific to local government. It is like a shotgun approach. LGLI is specific to local government so is more like a rifle. However, it provides participants with knowledge about the structure of local government in South Carolina. We have also begun sending some of our team members through LeaderGov's leadership development program. This involves a cohort of eight people matched with eight people from another organization. Over the course of eight monthly virtual sessions, these participants discuss topics which center around self-management.

All these are good programs and provide opportunities for growth. However, none of these programs spend very much time giving participants skills to manage and supervise people. Our plan was missing this crucial element. We wanted to ensure that our team members immediately below the department head level were provided with the tools they needed to succeed should they be promoted to a department head level position as those positions become vacant.

Project Originality/Innovation

While other counties may send team members to their county's Leadership _____ and/or to the Local Government Leadership Institute, we know of no other "home grown" leadership development program that has been developed for the express purpose of training the next generation of leaders. It has been increasingly difficult to hire managers, supervisors, and department heads from outside our organization, so this program was developed out of a need to "grow our own." Therefore, to our knowledge, this program is original in its design and its intent.

There was another innovative aspect to the program. Midway through the program our Executive Assistant reached out to various local restaurants to determine if they would be willing to donate lunch to the cohort participants in exchange for recognition during that month's program and on the County's Facebook page. In addition, participating restaurants were allowed, if they so desired, to appear at the month's lunch they sponsored, to briefly address the FCI participants. As a result, the remaining half of the sessions' lunches were provided by these restaurants, thereby reducing the cost of this program to the taxpayer.

Concluding Remarks

Florence County has developed a unique program to solve an issue that is facing all 46 counties in South Carolina - the "silver tsunami." We are investing in our team members to ensure that the culture we are developing perpetuates itself and remains after the current leadership retires.

We would like to thank all the Florence County team members that participated in the development of this program and the various Florence-area restaurants that provided lunch.

The second cohort of FCI started on August 12th. Based on the suggestions made by the first cohort participants, we have expanded the program to 90 minutes and will involve additional team members - both Deputy Administrators and department heads - in the presentation of each session. We will continue to adapt and improve the program with each successive cohort.

Finally, as a result of the comments from a couple of participants in the first cohort and, ironically, from a

citizen as well, we are also considering developing Florence County 101 - a six-to-eight-week class which would introduce various team members and members of the public to all the departments of the County and our operations. We continue to look for ways to develop the future leaders of Florence County.

Florence County Institute
Leadership Development Program
Second Cohort – 2026/2027

Syllabus

Introduction – August 12, 2026

- Introduction of participants
- Purpose of program
- Expectations of leaders at Florence County
- Any questions?
- Presentation of leadership book/Why this book?

Assignment – Read It's Your Ship prior to September session

Session One – September 9, 2026 – **Emotional Intelligence (EQ)**

- Review of last month's session/Q&A
- Presentation on Emotional Intelligence
- Discussion of emotional intelligence/Q&A

Assignments

- Read Introduction and Chapter 2 of It's Your Ship
- Read "8 powerful phrases of emotionally intelligent leaders"
- Watch Teamwork Summit video on EQ and share with team

Session Two – October 14, 2026 – **Motivation**

- Review of last month's session/Q&A
- Presentation on Motivation
- Discussion of motivation/Q&A

Assignments

- Read Chapters 10 and 12 of It's Your Ship
- Read "How to Motivate Your Team As a Leader – 10 Strategies"
- Watch Teamwork Summit video on motivation and share with team

Session Three – November 12, 2026* – **Managing Diversity**

- Review of last month's session/Q&A
- Presentation on Managing Diversity
- Discussion of managing diversity/Q&A

Assignments

- Read Chapters 5 and 11 of It's Your Ship
- Read "Managing A Diverse Team? 18 Leadership Tips For Success"
- Watch Teamwork Summit video on managing diversity and share with team

Session Four – December 9, 2026 – **Communication**

- Review of last month's session/Q&A
- Presentation on Communication
- Discussion of communication/Q&A

Assignments

- Read Chapter 5 of It's Your Ship
- Read "The Art Of Workplace Communication: Tips For Success And Connection"
- Watch Teamwork Summit video on communication and share with team

Session Five – January 13, 2027 – **Delegation**

- Review of last month's session/Q&A
- Presentation on Delegation
- Discussion of delegation/Q&A

Assignments

- Read Chapter 7 of It's Your Ship
- Read "8 Ways Leaders Delegate Successfully"
- Watch Teamwork Summit video on delegation and share with team

Session Six – February 10, 2027 – **Time Management**

- Review of last month's session/Q&A
- Presentation on Time Management
- Discussion of time management/Q&A

Assignments

- Read "The Ultimate Guide To Mastering Time Management"
- Watch Teamwork Summit video on time management and share with team

Session Seven – March 10, 2027 – **Conflict Resolution**

- Review of last month's session/Q&A
- Presentation on Conflict Resolution
- Discussion of conflict resolution/Q&A

Assignments

- Read Chapter 11 of It's Your Ship
- Read "Managing Conflict Resolution Effectively"
- Watch Teamwork Summit video on conflict resolution and share with team

Session Eight – April 14, 2027 – **Discipline/Corrective Action**

- Review of last month's session/Q&A
- Presentation on Discipline/Corrective Action
- Discussion of discipline/corrective action/Q&A

Assignments

- Read Chapter 6 of It's Your Ship
- Read "9 Effective Steps For Discipline In The Workplace"
- Watch Teamwork Summit video on discipline/corrective action and share with team

FLORENCE COUNTY COUNCIL

August 4, 2026

South Carolina Association of Counties
1919 Thurmond Mall
Columbia, SC 29201

Re: Letter of Support – Florence County's 2026 J. Mitchell Graham Award submission

Dear SCAC:

I am writing to express my strong support for Florence County's 2026 J. Mitchell Graham Award submission entitled "Solving the Silver Tsunami." Over the past year our team has developed the Florence County Institute, also known as FCI, for the purpose of providing an additional training opportunity for our managers and supervisors. This Institute, along with the other planks in our leadership development program, will serve to perpetuate the culture we are establishing at Florence County. This will ensure that this culture will survive as our leadership retires over the next several years.

After reading the written portion of the presentation and then viewing the in-person presentation, I trust you will see the benefit that this program provides to Florence County. In addition, this program solves an issue that all 46 counties in South Carolina are faced with – the current and coming wave of retirement by team members in senior leadership positions. This program is certainly worthy of receiving this year's J. Mitchell Graham Award.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Jerry W. Yarborough
Chairman, Florence County Council

180 North Irby Street MSC-G • Florence, South Carolina 29501 • (843) 665-3044 • Fax (843) 665-3042